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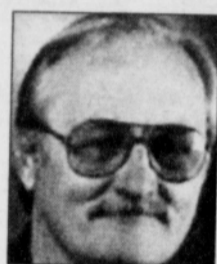
# OPINION

## Suffering Fates of their own Making

### A big season for falling stars

BY DONALD KAUL

Reversals of fortune can be breathtaking. One minute, people are riding high, surfing the wave of life. The next, they tip over like capsized canoes.



Take Paula Deen. This Typhoid Mary of the obesity epidemic made untold fortunes in becoming the unchallenged champion of southern cooking.

Her television shows, books, and restaurants were dedicated to the proposition that the only food groups that mattered were salt, sugar, and whipped cream. And if you could figure out a way to combine them with something deep-fried, so much the better.

I once turned on one of her shows and gained three pounds, just watching. But she's a lively,

cheerful sort, and her down-home charm won her hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of followers.

Until it was revealed, as part of a discrimination lawsuit filed against her, that she had used racist language in the past — the "N" word in particular — and allowed racist, sexist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic jokes to be part of the kitchen talk in at least one of her restaurants. Then there was that cringe-worthy concept of a "plantation-style wedding" with an all-black wait staff she suggested for her brother's nuptials.

The Food Network immediately cancelled one of her shows and announced plans to sever ties with her. Smithfield Foods, Walmart, Target, Caesar's Entertainment, and QVC, all huge sources of Deen's income, quickly followed suit.

Shortly thereafter, Sears, Kmart, and J.C. Penney said they would stop selling products branded with her name, which

prompted Random House to cancel a multi-million-dollar book contract with her.

Deen apologized. Then she apologized some more, desperately trying to stem the damage, but to no avail. The more she apologized, the more damage there was to stem.

Perhaps the cruelest blow fell when the pharmaceutical company, Novo Nordisk, fired her as its spokesperson for a diabetes drug. Thus ended the supreme hypocrisy of Deen, a Type 2 Diabetic whose recipes are virtual prescriptions for acquiring the disease, getting paid to flog its remedy. (It turned out she'd known she had the disease for several years but didn't admit it until the drug company hired her.)

Her fans still love her. She's still hugely popular with the huge people who keep lining up at her restaurants. But her days as a national figure are over.

Who says there's no good news anymore?

There's another fallen star who recently plummeted to Earth: Aaron Hernandez. This handsome, extravagantly talented football player signed a multi-year \$40 million contract with the New England Patriots only last year.

He was 23, just approaching his prime, and had recently become a father. He survived a rough childhood and was set up to live happily ever after.

Until last month — when police arrested him and charged him with being involved in the murder of one of his own friends. That was shocking, but pro football is no stranger to off-the-field incidents of a similar sort, often involving gunfire. Usually it turns out that the player was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

But as this drama unfolded, it became obvious that the victim hadn't merely been shot, but executed gangland style and that policed believed that Hernandez might have been personally involved.

Then, as the story spun out, police tied Hernandez to the recent drive-by shooting of two other acquaintances after they'd had an altercation with him. It was possible he'd been the triggerman, police said. That moved the story from OJ Simpsonville into Tony Soprano land.

He was jailed without bond and the Patriots voided his contract.

In a blink, Hernandez went from a life of fame and fortune to facing a future in a maximum-security prison. And from what we know, it wasn't even for a comprehensible reason. The killings grew out of two garden-variety barroom dust-ups.

I don't know whether these stories have a moral, but I do know this:

When you're on top of the world, there's only one direction for you to go — down.

So watch your step.

OtherWords columnist Donald Kaul lives in Ann Arbor, Mich.

## NBA: What Happens to the Undrafted?

### Getting college athletes prepared for victory in life

BY BENJAMIN TODD JEALOUS

In 2011, 17,500 college basketball players were registered with the National Collegiate Athletic Association. That year, 48 college players were drafted by NBA teams.



What happens to the undrafted? Some bounce around the international leagues for a few years, and a few even make it to the NBA. Many more go on to office jobs. But far too many college basketball players, especially players of color, leave college without an NBA contract and without another crucial ingredient for success: a college degree. As we reflect on last month's NBA draft, we should consider the fate of those many undrafted.

In the student-athlete equation, being a student must come first.

In order to make that happen, colleges need to start rewarding coaches for encouraging their players' growth in the classroom as much as their success on the field.

The student-athlete relationship in this country has always been out of balance. Colleges grow rich off of ticket sales, television rights and merchandise while many athletes struggle academically and ultimately fail to graduate. This crisis regained national attention in 2011, when the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport released an expose of black and white graduation rates on men's Division I basketball teams.

The report found a gaping racial gap. Overall, white players graduated at a 32 percent higher rate than their black teammates. Many large colleges and universities failed to graduate even half the black players on their teams.

At the University of Akron, the men's team had a 33 percent graduation rate — and a 33 percent white team. The graduation rate for black students? Zero.

In the wake of the report, the NCAA Board of Directors finally took action. Urged on by the In-

stitute, the NAACP, and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the NCAA's governing body voted to raise the minimum four-year Academic Progress Rate, effectively setting a minimum graduation rate for teams involved in the men's March Madness tournament. According to the new rules, any team that fails to graduate half their players for three years in a row is banned from postseason play. They also lose access to scholarship money.

This higher standard has helped bring the student-athlete relationship back into balance somewhat. This year, 10 schools were banned from the March Madness tournament for poor grades, including perennial power house University of Connecticut. The graduation rate for black players in this year's tournament increased from 59 percent to 65 percent, and the overall graduation rate inched up to 70 percent.

However, the race gap still is stubbornly persistent. The 65 percent graduation rate for black players this year is still 25 percentage points lower than the rate for white students. Nearly half of the teams that participated in this

year's tournament suffered racial gaps of 30 percent or more.

One solution is to change the incentive system for college coaches. According to a recent study, the average bonuses are 11 times greater than bonuses for academics. In recent weeks, USA Today's editorial board and former Maryland Congressman Tom McMillen both suggested that coaches' bonuses should be tied more strongly to players' academic performance.

Coaches' contracts should reflect the spirit of teamwork and mutual responsibility that makes the NCAA the premiere institution for young athletes. Coaches should be rewarded for effective strategies that keep their students at the

top of their academic game. One example of how to do this comes from Xavier, which employs a nun as academic adviser to make sure that students attend class and study hard. Xavier has graduated ever men's basketball player, black and white, since Sister Rose Ann Fleming began advising in 1985.

Colleges and universities clearly benefit from their students' athletic performance. They should also push their student-athletes to perform at peak academic capacity. That is the only way we can ensure that college athletes are prepared for victory in life as well as victory on the court.

Ben Jealous is president and chief executive officer of the NAACP.

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